









THE BRUSHWOOD BOY



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TORONTO





'IT WAS—IT WAS A POLLEMAN!'—p. 6.



THE  
BRUSHWOOD BOY

BY  
RUDYARD KIPLING

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. H. TOWNSEND*

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1907



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Girls and boys, come out to play :  
The moon is shining as bright as day !  
Leave your supper and leave your sleep,  
And come with your playfellows out in the street !  
Up the ladder and down the wall—

A CHILD of three sat up in his crib and screamed at the top of his voice, his fists clenched and his eyes full of terror. At first no one heard, for his nursery lay in the west wing, and the nurse was talking to a gardener among the laurels. Then the housekeeper passed that way, and hurried to soothe him. He was her special pet, and she disapproved of the nurse.

‘ What was it, then ?    What was it,



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then ? 'There's nothing to frighten him, Georgie dear.'

'It was—it was a Policeman ! He was on the Down—I saw him ! He came in. Jane *said* he would.'

'Policemen don't come into houses, dearie. Turn over, and take my hand.'

'I saw him—on the Down. He came here. Where is your hand, Harper ?'

The housekeeper waited till the sobs changed to the regular breathing of sleep before she stole out.

'Jane, what nonsense have you been telling Master Georgie about policemen ?'

'I haven't told him anything.'

'You have. He's been dreaming about them.'

'We met Tisdall on Dowhead when we were in the donkey-cart this morn-





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ing. P'raps that's what put it into his head.'

'Oh! Now you aren't going to frighten the child into fits with your silly tales, and the master know nothing about it. If ever I catch you again,' etc.

\* \* \* \* \*

A child of six was telling himself stories as he lay in bed. It was a new power, and he kept it a secret. A month before it had occurred to him to carry on a nursery tale left unfinished by his mother, and he was delighted to find the tale, as it came out of his own head, just as surprising as though he were listening to it 'all new from the beginning.' There was a prince in that tale, and he killed dragons, but only for one night. Ever afterwards Georgie dubbed himself prince, pasha, giant-killer, and all the rest (you see, he



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could not tell any one, for fear of being laughed at), and his tales faded gradually into dreamland, where adventures were so many that he could not recall the half of them. They all began in the same way, or, as Georgie explained to the shadows of the night-light, there was 'the same starting-off place'—a pile of brushwood stacked somewhere near a beach ; and round this pile Georgie found himself running races with little boys and girls. These ended, ships ran high up the dry land and opened into cardboard boxes ; or gilt-and-green iron railings that surrounded beautiful gardens turned all soft, and could be walked through and overthrown so long as he remembered it was only a dream. He could never hold that knowledge more than a few seconds ere things became real, and instead of pushing down houses full of grown-up people (a just revenge),



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he sat miserably upon gigantic door-steps trying to sing the multiplication-table up to four times six.

The princess of his tales was a person of wonderful beauty (she came from the old illustrated edition of Grimm, now out of print), and as she always applauded Georgie's valour among the dragons and buffaloes, he gave her the two finest names he had ever heard in his life—Annie and Louise, pronounced 'Annieanlouise.' When the dreams swamped the stories, she would change into one of the little girls round the brushwood-pile, still keeping her title and crown. She saw Georgie drown once in a dream-sea by the beach (it was the day after he had been taken to bathe in a real sea by his nurse); and he said as he sank: 'Poor Annieanlouise! She'll be sorry for me now!' But 'Annieanlouise,' walking slowly on



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the beach, cried, ‘“ Ha ! ha ! ” said the duck, laughing,’ which to a waking mind might not seem to bear on the situation. It consoled Georgie at once, and must have been some kind of spell, for it raised the bottom of the deep, and he waded out with a twelve-inch flower-pot on each foot. Since he was strictly forbidden to meddle with flower-pots in real life, he felt triumphantly wicked.

\* \* \* \* \*

The movements of the grown-ups, whom Georgie tolerated, but did not pretend to understand, removed his world, when he was seven years old, to a place called ‘Oxford-on-a-visit.’ Here were huge buildings surrounded by vast prairies, with streets of infinite length, and, above all, something called the ‘buttery,’ which Georgie was dying to see, because he knew it must be





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greasy, and therefore delightful. He perceived how correct were his judgments when his nurse led him through a stone arch into the presence of an enormously fat man, who asked him if he would like some bread and cheese. Georgie was used to eat all round the clock, so he took what 'buttery' gave him, and would have taken some brown liquid called 'auditale,' but that his nurse led him away to an afternoon performance of a thing called 'Pepper's Ghost.' This was intensely thrilling. People's heads came off and flew all over the stage, and skeletons danced bone by bone, while Mr. Pepper himself, beyond question a man of the worst, waved his arms and flapped a long gown, and in a deep bass voice (Georgie had never heard a man sing before) told of his sorrows unspeakable. Some grown-up or other tried to explain







'I'VE GOT A CUT ON MY THUMB' SAID HE. 'I'M THO THORRY!' SHE LISPED.

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that the illusion was made with mirrors, and that there was no need to be frightened. Georgie did not know what illusions were, but he did know that a mirror was the looking-glass with the ivory handle on his mother's dressing-table. Therefore the 'grown-up' was 'just saying things' after the distressing custom of 'grown-ups,' and Georgie cast about for amusement between scenes. Next to him sat a little girl dressed all in black, her hair combed off her forehead exactly like the girl in the book called 'Alice in Wonderland,' which had been given him on his last birthday. The little girl looked at Georgie, and Georgie looked at her. There seemed to be no need of any further introduction.

'I've got a cut on my thumb,' said he. It was the first work of his first real knife, a savage triangular hack,



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and he esteemed it a most valuable possession.

‘I’m tho thorry!’ she lisped. ‘Let me look—pleathe.’

‘There’s a di-ack-lum plaster on, but it’s all raw under,’ Georgie answered, complying.

‘Dothent it hurt?’ Her gray eyes were full of pity and interest.

‘Awf’ly. Perhaps it will give me lockjaw.’

‘It lookth very horrid. I’m *tho* thorry!’ She put a forefinger to his hand, and held her head sidewise for a better view.

Here the nurse turned, and shook him severely. ‘You mustn’t talk to strange little girls, Master Georgie.’

‘She isn’t strange. She’s very nice. I like her, an’ I’ve showed her my new cut.’

‘The idea! You change places with me.’





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She moved him over, and shut out the little girl from his view, while the grown-up behind renewed the futile explanations.

‘I am *not* afraid, truly,’ said the boy, wriggling in despair; ‘but why don’t you go to sleep in the afternoons, same as Provostoforiel?’

Georgie had been introduced to a grown-up of that name, who slept in his presence without apology. Georgie understood that he was the most important grown-up in Oxford; hence he strove to gild his rebuke with flatteries. This grown-up did not seem to like it, but he collapsed, and Georgie lay back in his seat, silent and enraptured. Mr. Pepper was singing again, and the deep, ringing voice, the red fire, and the misty, waving gown all seemed to be mixed up with the little girl who had been so kind about his cut. When the







AND SHE WAITING FOR HIM.

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performance was ended she nodded to Georgie, and Georgie nodded in return. He spoke no more than was necessary till bedtime, but meditated on new colours, and sounds, and lights, and music, and things as far as he understood them ; the deep-mouthed agony of Mr. Pepper mingling with the little girl's lisp. That night he made a new tale, from which he shamelessly removed the Rapunzel-Rapunzel-let-down-your-hair princess, gold crown, Grimm edition, and all, and put a new *Annieanlouse* in her place. So it was perfectly right and natural that when he came to the brushwood-pile he should find her waiting for him, her hair combed off her forehead, more like Alice in Wonderland than ever ; and the races and adventures began.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ten years at an English public school



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do not encourage dreaming. Georgie won his growth and chest measurement, and a few other things which did not appear in the bills, under a system of cricket, football, and paper-chases, from four to five days a week, which provided for three lawful cuts of a ground-ash if any boy absented himself from these entertainments. He became a rumple-collared, dusty-hatted fag of the Lower Third, and a light half-back at Little Side football ; was pushed and prodded through the slack back-waters of the Lower Fourth, where the raffle of a school generally accumulates ; won his 'second-fifteen' cap at football, enjoyed the dignity of a study with two companions in it, and began to look forward to office as a sub-prefect. At last he blossomed into full glory as Head of the school, ex-officio Captain of the Games ; head of his house, where he and his





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lieutenants preserved discipline and decency among seventy boys from twelve to seventeen ; general arbiter in the quarrels that spring up among the touchy Sixth—and intimate friend and ally of the Head himself. When he stepped forth in the black jersey, white knickers, and black stockings of the First Fifteen, the new match-ball under his arm, and his old and frayed cap at the back of his head, the small fry of the lower forms stood apart and worshipped, and the ‘new caps’ of the team talked to him ostentatiously, that the world might see. And so, in summer, when he came back to the pavilion after a slow but eminently safe game, it mattered not whether he had made nothing or, as once happened, a hundred and three, the school shouted just the same, and womenfolk who had come to look at the match looked at



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Cottar—Cottar *major* ; ‘that’s Cottar !’ Above all, he was responsible for that thing called the tone of the school, and few realise with what passionate devotion a certain type of boy throws himself into this work. Home was a far-away country, full of ponies and fishing, and shooting, and men-visitors who interfered with one’s plans ; but school was his real world, where things of vital importance happened, and crises arose that must be dealt with promptly and quietly. Not for nothing was it written, ‘Let the Consuls look to it that the Republic takes no harm,’ and Georgie was glad to be back in authority when the holidays ended. Behind him, but not too near, was the wise and temperate Head, now suggesting the wisdom of the serpent, now counselling the mildness of the dove ; leading him on to see, more by half-hints than by



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any direct word, how boys and men are all of a piece, and how he who can handle the one will assuredly in time control the other.

For the rest, the school was not encouraged to dwell on its emotions, but rather to keep in hard condition, to avoid false quantities, and to enter the army direct, without the help of the expensive London crammer, under whose roof young blood learns too much. Cottar *major* went the way of hundreds before him. The Head gave him six months' final polish, taught him what kind of answers best please a certain kind of examiners, and handed him over to the properly constituted authorities, who passed him into Sandhurst. Here he had sense enough to see that he was in the Lower Third once more, and behaved with respect towards his seniors, till they in turn



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respected him, and he was promoted to the rank of corporal, and sat in authority over mixed peoples with all the vices of men and boys combined. His reward was another string of athletic cups, a good-conduct sword, and, at last, Her Majesty's Commission as a subaltern in a first-class line regiment. He did not know that he bore with him from school and college a character worth much fine gold, but was pleased to find his mess so kindly. He had plenty of money of his own ; his training had set the public school mask upon his face, and had taught him how many were the 'things no fellow can do.' By virtue of the same training he kept his pores open and his mouth shut.

The regular working of the Empire shifted his world to India, where he tasted utter loneliness in subaltern's quarters—one room and one bullock-





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trunk—and, with his mess, learned the new life from the beginning. But there were horses in the land—ponies at reasonable price; there was polo for such as could afford it; there were the disreputable remnants of a pack of hounds, and Cottar worried his way along without too much despair. It dawned on him that a regiment in India was nearer the chance of active service than he had conceived, and that a man might as well study his profession. A major of the new school backed this idea with enthusiasm, and he and Cottar accumulated a library of military works, and read and argued and disputed far into the nights. But the adjutant said the old thing: ‘Get to know your men, young ’un, and they’ll follow you anywhere. That’s all you want—know your men.’ Cottar thought he knew them fairly well at



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cricket and the regimental sports, but he never realised the true inwardness of them till he was sent off with a detachment of twenty to sit down in a mud fort near a rushing river which was spanned by a bridge of boats. When the floods came they went forth and hunted strayed pontoons along the banks. Otherwise there was nothing to do, and the men got drunk, gambled, and quarrelled. They were a sickly crew, for a junior subaltern is by custom saddled with the worst men. Cottar endured their rioting as long as he could, and then sent down-country for a dozen pairs of boxing-gloves.

‘I wouldn’t blame you for fightin’,’ said he, ‘if you only knew how to use your hands; but you don’t. Take these things and I’ll show you.’ The men appreciated his efforts. Now, instead of blaspheming and swearing at



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a comrade, and threatening to shoot him, they could take him apart and soothe themselves to exhaustion. As one explained whom Cottar found with a shut eye and a diamond-shaped mouth spitting blood through an embrasure : ‘ We tried it with the gloves, sir, for twenty minutes, and *that* done us no good, sir. Then we took off the gloves and tried it that way for another twenty minutes, same as you showed us, sir, an’ that done us a world o’ good. ’Twasn’t fightin’, sir ; there was a bet on.’

Cottar dared not laugh, but he invited his men to other sports, such as racing across country in shirt and trousers after a trail of torn paper, and to single-stick in the evenings, till the native population, who had a lust for sport in every form, wished to know whether the white men understood wrestling. They sent in an ambassador, who took the soldiers



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by the neck and threw them about the dust ; and the entire command were all for this new game. They spent money on learning new falls and holds, which was better than buying other doubtful commodities ; and the peasantry grinned five deep round the tournaments.

That detachment, who had gone up in bullock-carts, returned to headquarters at an average rate of thirty miles a day, fair heel-and-toe ; no sick, no prisoners, and no court-martials pending. They scattered themselves among their friends, singing the praises of their lieutenant and looking for causes of offence.

‘ How did you do it, young ’un ? ’ the adjutant asked.

‘ Oh, I sweated the beef off ’em, and then I sweated some muscle on to ’em. It was rather a lark. ’

‘ If that’s your way of lookin’ at it, we can give you all the larks you want.





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Young Davies isn't feelin' quite fit, and he's next for detachment duty. Care to go for him ?'

'Sure he wouldn't mind ? I don't want to shove myself forward, you know.'

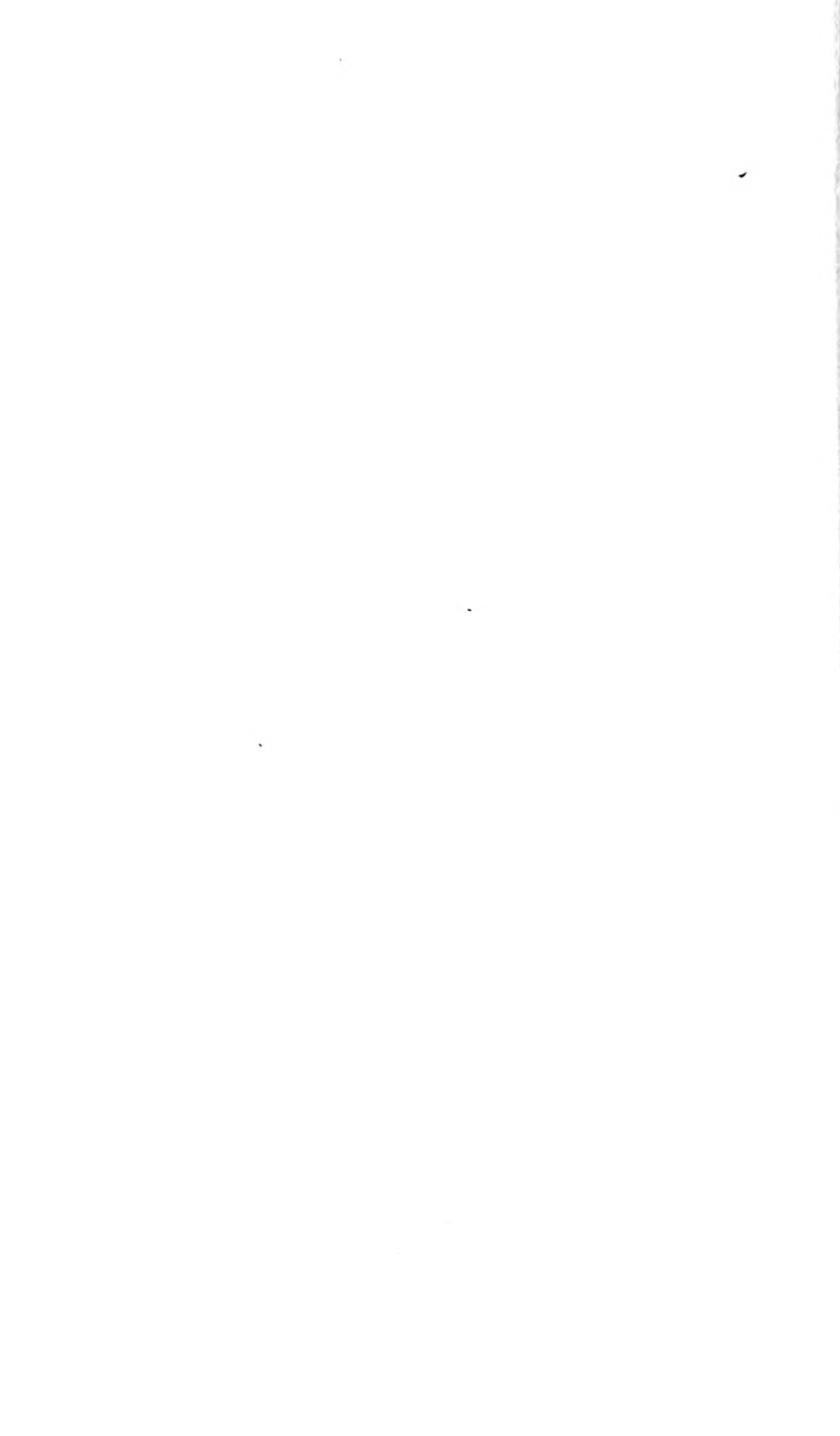
'You needn't bother on Davies's account. We'll give you the sweepin's of the corps, and you can see what you can make of 'em.'

'All right,' said Cottar. 'It's better fun than loafin' about cantonments.'

'Rummy thing,' said the adjutant, after Cottar had returned to his wilderness with twenty other devils worse than the first. 'If Cottar only knew it, half the women in the station would give their eyes — confound 'em ! — to have the young 'un in tow.'

'That accounts for Mrs. Elery sayin' I was workin' my nice new boy too hard,' said a wing commander.

'Oh yes ; and "Why doesn't he



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come to the bandstand in the evenings?" and "Can't I get him to make up a four at tennis with the Hammon girls?" the adjutant snorted. 'Look at young Davies makin' an ass of himself over mutton-dressed-as-lamb old enough to be his mother!'

'No one can accuse young Cottar of runnin' after women, white *or* black,' the major replied thoughtfully. 'But, then, that's the kind that generally goes the worst mucker in the end.'

'Not Cottar. I've only run across one of his muster before—a fellow called Ingles, in South Africa. He was just the same hard-trained, athletic-sports build of animal. Always kept himself in the pink of condition. Didn't do him much good, though. Shot at Wesselstroom the week before Majuba. Wonder how the young 'un will lick his detachment into shape.'



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Cottar turned up six weeks later, on foot, with his pupils. He never told his experiences, but the men spoke enthusiastically, and fragments of it leaked back to the colonel through sergeants, bâtmén, and the like.

There was great jealousy between the first and second detachments, but the men united in adoring Cottar, and their way of showing it was by sparing him all the trouble that men know how to make for an unloved officer. He sought popularity as little as he had sought it at school, and therefore it came to him. He favoured no one—not even when the company sloven pulled the company cricket-match out of the fire with an unexpected forty-three at the last moment. There was very little getting round him, for he seemed to know by instinct exactly when and where to head off a



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malingering ; but he did not forget that the difference between a dazed and sulky junior of the upper school and a bewildered, browbeaten lump of a private fresh from the depot was very small indeed. The sergeants, seeing these things, told him secrets generally hid from young officers. His words were quoted as barrack authority on bets in canteen and at tea ; and the veriest shrew of the corps, bursting with charges against other women who had used the cooking-ranges out of turn, forbore to speak when Cottar, as the regulations ordained, asked of a morning if there were ‘any complaints.’

‘I’m full o’ complaints,’ said Mrs. Corporal Morrison, ‘an’ I’d kill O’Halloran’s fat cow of a wife any day, but ye know how it is. ’E puts ’is head just inside the door, an’ looks down ’is blessed nose so bashful, an’ ’e





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whispers, "Any complaints?" Ye can't complain after that. *I* want to kiss him. Some day I think I will. Heigh-ho! She'll be a lucky woman that gets Young Innocence. See 'im now, girls. Do ye blame me?'

Cottar was cantering across to polo, and he looked a very satisfactory figure of a man as he gave easily to the first excited bucks of his pony, and slipped over a low mud wall to the practice-ground. There were more than Mrs. Corporal Morrison who felt as she did. But Cottar was busy for eleven hours of the day. He did not care to have his tennis spoiled by petticoats in the court; and after one long afternoon at a garden-party, he explained to his major that this sort of thing was 'futile piffle,' and the major laughed. Theirs was not a married mess, except for the colonel's wife, and Cottar stood in awe



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of the good lady. She said 'my regiment,' and the world knows what that means. None the less, when they wanted her to give away the prizes after a shooting-match, and she refused because one of the prize-winners was married to a girl who had made a jest of her behind her broad back, the mess ordered Cottar to 'tackle her,' in his best calling-kit. This he did, simply and laboriously, and she gave way altogether.

'She only wanted to know the facts of the case,' he explained. 'I just told her, and she saw at once.'

'Ye-es,' said the adjutant. 'I expect that's what she did. 'Comin' to the Fusiliers' dance to-night, Galahad?'

'No, thanks. I've got a fight on with the major.' The virtuous apprentice sat up till midnight in the major's quarters, with a stop-watch and a



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pair of compasses, shifting little painted lead blocks about a four-inch map.

Then he turned in and slept the sleep of innocence, which is full of healthy dreams. One peculiarity of his dreams he noticed at the beginning of his second hot weather. Two or three times a month they duplicated or ran in series. He would find himself sliding into dreamland by the same road — a road that ran along a beach near a pile of brushwood. To the right lay the sea, sometimes at full tide, sometimes withdrawn to the very horizon ; but he knew it for the same sea. By that road he would travel over a swell of rising ground covered with short, withered grass, into valleys of wonder and unreason. Beyond the ridge, which was crowned with some sort of street-lamp, anything was possible ; but up to the lamp it seemed to him that he knew the road as well as



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he knew the parade-ground. He learned to look forward to the place ; for, once there, he was sure of a good night's ride, and Indian hot weather can be rather trying. First, shadowy under closing eyelids, would come the outline of the brushwood-pile ; next the white sand of the beach road, almost overhanging the black, changeful sea ; then the turn inland and uphill to the single light. When he was unrestful for any reason, he would tell himself how he was sure to get there—sure to get there—if he shut his eyes and surrendered to the drift of things. But one night after a foolishly hard hour's polo (the thermometer was 94° in his quarters at ten o'clock), sleep stood away from him altogether, though he did his best to find the well-known road, the point where true sleep began. At last he saw the brushwood-pile, and hurried along to the ridge, for behind









'I AM POLICEMAN DAY COMING BACK FROM THE CITY OF SLEEP. YOU  
COME WITH ME.

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him he felt was the wide-awake, sultry world. He reached the lamp in safety, tingling with drowsiness, when a policeman—a common country policeman—sprang up before him and touched him on the shoulder ere he could dive into the dim valley below. He was filled with terror,—the hopeless terror of dreams,—for the policeman said, in the awful, distinct voice of the dream-people ‘I am Policeman Day coming back from the City of Sleep. You come with me.’ Georgie knew it was true—that just beyond him in the valley lay the lights of the City of Sleep, where he would have been sheltered, and that this Policeman-Thing had full power and authority to head him back to miserable wakefulness. He found himself looking at the moonlight on the wall, dripping with fright ; and he never overcame that horror, though he met the







' THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT I EXPECTED HONG-KONG WOULD BE LIKE.

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policeman several times that hot weather, and his coming was the forerunner of a bad night.

But other dreams—perfectly absurd ones—filled him with an incommunicable delight. All those that he remembered began by the brushwood-pile. For instance, he found a small clockwork steamer (he had noticed it many nights before) lying by the sea-road, and stepped into it, whereupon it moved with surpassing swiftness over an absolutely level sea. This was glorious, for he felt he was exploring great matters ; and it stopped by a lily carved in stone, which, most naturally, floated on the water. Seeing the lily was labelled ‘ Hong-Kong,’ Georgie said : ‘ Of course. This is precisely what I expected Hong-Kong would be like. How magnificent ! ’ Thousands of miles farther on it halted at yet another stone lily, labelled ‘ Java ’ ;









SOME ONE MOVED AMONG THE REEDS.

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and this again delighted him hugely, because he knew that now he was at the world's end. But the little boat ran on and on till it stopped in a deep fresh-water lock, the sides of which were carven marble, green with moss. Lily-pads lay on the water, and reeds arched above. Some one moved among the reeds—some one whom Georgie knew he had travelled to this world's end to reach. Therefore everything was entirely well with him. He was unspeakably happy, and vaulted over the ship's side to find this person. When his feet touched that still water, it changed, with the rustle of unrolling maps, to nothing less than a sixth quarter of the globe, beyond the most remote imaginings of man—a place where islands were coloured yellow and blue, their lettering strung across their faces. They gave on unknown seas, and Georgie's urgent



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desire was to return swiftly across this floating atlas to known bearings. He told himself repeatedly that it was no good to hurry ; but still he hurried desperately, and the islands slipped and slid under his feet, the straits yawned and widened, till he found himself utterly lost in the world's fourth dimension, with no hope of return. Yet only a little distance away he could see the old world with the rivers and mountain-chains marked according to the Sandhurst rules of map-making. Then that person for whom he had come to the Lily Lock (that was its name) ran up across unexplored territories, and showed him a way. They fled hand in hand till they reached a road that spanned ravines, and ran along the edge of precipices, and was tunnelled through mountains. 'This goes to our brushwood-pile,' said his companion ;



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and all his trouble was at an end. He took a pony, because he understood that this was the Thirty-Mile-Ride, and he must ride swiftly ; and raced through the clattering tunnels and round the curves, always downhill, till he heard the sea to his left, and saw it raging under a full moon against sandy cliffs. It was heavy going, but he recognised the nature of the country, the dark purple downs inland, and the bents that whistled in the wind. The road was eaten away in places, and the sea lashed at him—black, foamless tongues of smooth and glossy rollers ; but he was sure that there was less danger from the sea than from ‘Them,’ whoever ‘They’ were, inland to his right. He knew, too, that he would be safe if he could reach the down with the lamp on it. This came as he expected : he saw the one light a mile ahead along the beach,









THE THIRTY-MILE RIDE.

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dismounted, turned to the right, walked quietly over to the brushwood-pile, found the little steamer had returned to the beach whence he had unmoored it, and—must have fallen asleep, for he could remember no more. ‘I’m gettin’ the hang of the geography of that place,’ he said to himself, as he shaved next morning. ‘I must have made some sort of circle. Let’s see. The Thirty-Mile-Ride (now how the deuce did I know it was called the Thirty-Mile-Ride?) joins the sea-road beyond the first down where the lamp is. And that atlas-country lies at the back of the Thirty-Mile-Ride, somewhere out to the right beyond the hills and tunnels. Rummy thing, dreams. ’Wonder what makes mine fit into each other so?’

He continued on his solid way through the recurring duties of the seasons. The regiment was shifted to



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another station, and he enjoyed road marching for two months, with a good deal of mixed shooting thrown in ; and when they reached their new cantonments he became a member of the local Tent Club, and chased the mighty boar on horseback with a short stabbing-spear. There he met the *mahseer* of the Poonch, beside whom the tarpon is as a herring, and he who lands him can say that he is a fisherman. This was as new and as fascinating as the big game shooting that fell to his portion, when he had himself photographed for the mother's benefit, sitting on the flank of his first tiger.

Then the adjutant was promoted, and Cottar rejoiced with him, for he admired the adjutant greatly, and marvelled who might be big enough to fill his place ; so that he nearly collapsed when the mantle fell on his



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own shoulders, and the colonel said a few sweet things that made him blush. An adjutant's position does not differ materially from that of head of the school, and Cottar stood in the same relation to the colonel as he had to his old Head in England. Only, tempers wear out in hot weather, and things were said and done that tried him sorely, and he made glorious blunders, from which the regimental sergeant-major pulled him with a loyal soul and a shut mouth. Slovens and incompetents raged against him ; the weak-minded strove to lure him from the ways of justice ; the small-minded—yea, men whom Cottar believed would never do 'things no fellow can do'—imputed motives mean and circuitous to actions that he had not spent a thought upon ; and he tasted injustice, and it made him very sick. But his





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consolation came on parade, when he looked down the full companies, and reflected how few were in hospital or cells, and wondered when the time would come to try the machine of his love and labour. But they needed and expected the whole of a man's working-day, and maybe three or four hours of the night. Curiously enough, he never dreamed about the regiment as he was popularly supposed to. The mind, set free from the day's doings, generally ceased working altogether, or, if it moved at all, carried him along the old beach road to the downs, the lamp-post, and, once in a while, to terrible Policeman Day. The second time that he returned to the world's lost continent (this was a dream that repeated itself again and again, with variations, on the same ground) he knew that if he only sat still the



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person from the Lily Lock would help him ; and he was not disappointed. Sometimes he was trapped in mines of vast depth hollowed out of the heart of the world, where men in torment chanted echoing songs ; and he heard this person coming along through the galleries, and everything was made safe and delightful. They met again in low-roofed Indian railway carriages that halted in a garden surrounded by gilt and green railings, where a mob of stony white people, all unfriendly, sat at breakfast-tables covered with roses, and separated Georgie from his companion, while underground voices sang deep-voiced songs. Georgie was filled with enormous despair till they two met again. They forgathered in the middle of an endless hot tropic night, and crept into a huge house that stood, he knew, somewhere north of







A SICK THING LAY IN BED.

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the railway station where the people ate among the roses. It was surrounded with gardens, all moist and dripping ; and in one room, reached through leagues of whitewashed passages, a Sick Thing lay in bed. Now the least noise, Georgie knew, would unchain some waiting horror, and his companion knew it too ; but when their eyes met across the bed, Georgie was disgusted to see that she was a child—a little girl in strapped shoes, with her black hair combed back from her forehead.

‘ What disgraceful folly ! ’ he thought. ‘ Now she could do nothing whatever if Its head came off. ’

Then the thing coughed, and the ceiling shattered down in plaster on the mosquito-netting, and ‘ They ’ rushed in from all quarters. He dragged the child through the stifling garden, voices chanting behind them, and they rode









SET LIGHT TO POPULOUS CITIES TO SEE HOW THEY WOULD BURN.

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the Thirty-Mile-Ride under whip and spur along the sandy beach by the booming sea, till they came to the downs, the lamp-post, and the brushwood-pile, which was safety. Very often dreams would break up about them in this fashion, and they would be separated, to endure awful adventures alone. But the most amusing times were when he and she had a clear understanding that it was all make-believe, and walked through mile-wide roaring rivers without even taking off their shoes, or set light to populous cities to see how they would burn, and were rude as any children to the vague shadows met in their rambles. Later in the night they were sure to suffer for this, either at the hands of the Railway People eating among the roses, or in the tropic uplands at the far end of the Thirty-Mile-Ride. Together, this did



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not much affright them ; but often Georgie would hear her shrill cry of ‘ Boy ! Boy ! ’ half a world away, and hurry to her rescue before ‘ They ’ maltreated her.

He and she explored the dark purple downs as far inland from the brushwood-pile as they dared, but that was always a dangerous matter. The interior was filled with ‘ Them,’ and ‘ They ’ went about singing in the hollows, and Georgie and she felt safer on or near the seaboard. So thoroughly had he come to know the place of his dreams that even waking he accepted it as a real country, and made a rough sketch of it. He kept his own counsel, of course ; but the permanence of the land puzzled him. His ordinary dreams were as formless and as fleeting as any healthy dreams could be, but once at the brushwood-pile he moved



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within known limits and could see where he was going. There were months at a time when nothing notable crossed his sleep. Then the dreams would come in a batch of five or six, and next morning the map that he kept in his writing-case would be written up to date, for Georgie was a most methodical person. There was, indeed, a danger—his seniors said so—of his developing into a regular ‘Auntie Fuss’ of an adjutant ; and when an officer once takes to old-maidism there is more hope for the virgin of seventy than for him.

But fate sent the change that was needed, in the shape of a little winter campaign on the border, which, after the manner of little campaigns, flashed out into a very ugly war ; and Cottar’s regiment was chosen among the first.

‘Now,’ said a major, ‘this’ll shake the cobwebs out of us all—especially





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you, Galahad ; and we can see what your hen-with-one-chick attitude has done for the regiment.'

Cottar nearly wept with joy as the campaign went forward. They were fit—physically fit beyond the other troops ; they were good children in camp, wet or dry, fed or unfed ; and they followed their officers with the quick suppleness and trained obedience of a first-class football fifteen. They were cut off from their apology for a base, and cheerfully cut their way back to it again ; they crowned and cleaned out hills full of the enemy with the precision of well-broken dogs of chase ; and in the hour of retreat, when, hampered with the sick and wounded of the column, they were persecuted down eleven miles of waterless valley, they, serving as rearguard, covered themselves with a great glory in the eyes of



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fellow-professionals. Any regiment can advance, but few know how to retreat with a sting in the tail. Then they turned to and made roads, most often under fire, and dismantled some inconvenient mud redoubts. They were the last corps to be withdrawn when the rubbish of the campaign was all swept up ; and after a month in standing camp, which tries morals severely, they departed to their own place singing—

'E's goin' to do without 'em—  
Don't want 'em any more ;  
'E's goin' to do without 'em,  
As 'e's often done before,  
'E's goin' to be a martyr  
On a 'ighly novel plan,  
An' all the boys and girls will say,  
'Ow ! what a nice young man—man—man !  
Ow ! what a nice young man !'

There came out a *Gazette*, in which Cottar found that he had been behaving with 'courage and coolness and discretion' in all his capacities ; that he had



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assisted the wounded under fire, and blown in a gate, also under fire. Net result, his captaincy and a brevet majority, coupled with the Distinguished Service Order.

As to his wounded, he explained that they were both heavy men, whom he could lift more easily than any one else. 'Otherwise, of course, I should have sent out one of my chaps; and, of course, about that gate business, we were safe the minute we were well under the walls.' But this did not prevent his men from cheering him furiously whenever they saw him, or the mess from giving him a dinner on the eve of his departure to England. (A year's leave was among the things he had 'snaffled out of the campaign,' to use his own words.) The doctor, who had taken quite as much as was good for him, quoted poetry about 'a good blade carving the casques of men,'



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and so on, and everybody told Cottar that he was an excellent person ; but when he rose to make his maiden speech they shouted so that he was understood to say :—‘ It isn’t any use tryin’ to speak with you chaps rottin’ me like this. Let’s have some pool.’

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not unpleasant to spend eight-and-twenty days in an easy-going steamer on warm waters, in the company of a woman who lets you see that you are head and shoulders superior to the rest of the world, even though that woman may be, and most often is, ten counted years your senior. P. O. boats are not lighted with the disgusting particularity of Atlantic liners. There is more phosphorescence at the bows, and greater silence and darkness by the hand-steering gear aft.

Awful things might have happened





## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

to Georgie, but for the little fact that he had never studied the first principles of the game he was expected to play. So when Mrs. Zuleika, at Aden, told him how motherly an interest she felt in his welfare, medals, brevet, and all, Georgie took her at the foot of the letter, and promptly talked of his own mother, three hundred miles nearer each day, of his home, and so forth, all the way up the Red Sea. It was much easier than he had supposed to converse with a woman for an hour at a time. Then Mrs. Zuleika, turning from parental affection, spoke of love in the abstract as a thing not unworthy of study, and in discreet twilights after dinner demanded confidences. Georgie would have been delighted to supply them, but he had none, and did not know it was his duty to manufacture them. Mrs. Zuleika expressed surprise and unbelief, and



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asked those questions which deep asks of deep. She learned all that was necessary to conviction, and, being very much a woman, resumed (Georgie never knew that she had abandoned) the motherly attitude.

‘Do you know,’ she said, somewhere in the Mediterranean, ‘I think you’re the very dearest boy I have ever met in my life, and I’d like you to remember me a little. You will when you are older, but I want you to remember me now. You’ll make some girl very happy.’

‘Oh ! ’Hope so,’ said Georgie, gravely ; ‘but there’s heaps of time for marryin’, an’ all that sort of thing, ain’t there ?’

‘That depends. Here are your bean-bags for the Ladies’ Competition. I think I’m growing too old to care for these *tamashas*.’



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They were getting up sports, and Georgie was on the committee. He never noticed how perfectly the bags were sewn, but another woman did, and smiled—once. He liked Mrs. Zuleika greatly. She was a bit old, of course, but uncommonly nice. There was no nonsense about her.

A few nights after they passed Gibraltar his dream returned to him. She who waited by the brushwood-pile was no longer a little girl, but a woman with black hair that grew into a 'widow's peak,' combed back from her forehead. He knew her for the child in black, the companion of the last six years, and, as it had been in the time of the meetings on the Lost Continent, he was filled with delight unspeakable. 'They,' for some dreamland reason, were friendly or had gone away that night,







HE COULD ALMOST HAVE SWORN THAT THE KISS WAS REAL.



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and the two flitted together over all their country, from the brushwood-pile up the Thirty-Mile-Ride, till they saw the House of the Sick Thing, a pin-point in the distance to the left; stamped through the Railway Waiting-room where the roses lay on the spread breakfast-tables; and returned, by the ford and the city they had once burned for sport, to the great swells of the downs under the lamp-post. Wherever they moved a strong singing followed them underground, but this night there was no panic. All the land was empty except for themselves, and at the last (they were sitting by the lamp-post hand in hand) she turned and kissed him. He woke with a start, staring at the waving curtain of the cabin door; he could almost have sworn that the kiss was real.

Next morning the ship was rolling



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in a Biscay sea, and people were not happy ; but as Georgie came to breakfast, shaven, tubbed, and smelling of soap, several turned to look at him because of the light in his eyes and the splendour of his countenance.

‘ Well, you look beastly fit,’ snapped a neighbour. ‘ Any one left you a legacy in the middle of the Bay ? ’

Georgie reached for the curry, with a seraphic grin. ‘ I suppose it’s the gettin’ so near home, and all that. I do feel rather festive this mornin’.

’Rolls a bit, doesn’t she ? ’

Mrs. Zuleika stayed in her cabin till the end of the voyage, when she left without bidding him farewell, and wept passionately on the dock-head for pure joy of meeting her children, who, she had often said, were so like their father.

Georgie headed for his own county, wild with delight of first long furlough



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after the lean seasons. Nothing was changed in that orderly life, from the coachman who met him at the station to the white peacock that stormed at the carriage from the stone wall above the shaven lawns. The house took toll of him with due regard to precedence—first the mother ; then the father ; then the housekeeper, who wept and praised God ; then the butler ; and so on down to the under-keeper, who had been dog-boy in George's youth, and called him 'Master Georgie,' and was reproved by the groom who had taught Georgie to ride.

'Not a thing changed,' he sighed contentedly, when the three of them sat down to dinner in the late sunlight, while the rabbits crept out upon the lawn below the cedars, and the big trout in the ponds by the home paddock rose for their evening meal.



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‘*Our* changes are all over, dear,’ cooed the mother ; ‘and now I am getting used to your size and your tan (you’re very brown, Georgie), I see you haven’t changed in the least. You’re exactly like the Pater.’

The father beamed on this man after his own heart,—‘Youngest major in the army, and should have had the V.C., sir,’—and the butler listened with his professional mask off when Master Georgie spoke of war as it is waged to-day, and his father cross-questioned.

They went out on the terrace to smoke among the roses, and the shadow of the old house lay long across the wonderful English foliage, which is the only living green in the world.

‘Perfect ! By Jove, it’s perfect !’ Georgie was looking at the round-bosomed woods beyond the home paddock, where the white pheasant-





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boxes were ranged ; and the golden air was full of a hundred sacred scents and sounds. Georgie felt his father's arm tighten in his.

‘It's not half bad—but *hodie mihi, cras tibi*, isn't it? I suppose you'll be turning up some fine day with a girl under your arm, if you haven't one now, eh?’

‘You can make your mind easy, sir. I haven't one.’

‘Not in all these years?’ said the mother.

‘I hadn't time, mummy. They keep a man pretty busy, these days, in the service, and most of our mess are unmarried, too.’

‘But you must have met hundreds in society—at balls, and so on?’

‘I'm like the Tenth, mummy : I don't dance.’

‘Don't dance ! What have you



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been doing with yourself, then—backing other men's bills ?' said the father.

'Oh, yes ; I've done a little of that too ; but you see, as things are now, a man has all his work cut out for him to keep abreast of his profession, and my days were always too full to let me lark about half the night.'

'Hmm !'—suspiciously.

'It's never too late to learn. We ought to give some kind of housewarming for the people about, now you've come back. Unless you want to go straight up to town, dear ?'

'No. I don't want anything better than this. Let's sit still and enjoy ourselves. I suppose there will be something for me to ride if I look for it ?'

'Seeing I've been kept down to the old brown pair for the last six weeks because all the others were being got



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ready for Master Georgie, I should say there might be,' the father chuckled. 'They're reminding me in a hundred ways that I must take the second place now.'

'Brutes !'

'The Pater doesn't mean it, dear ; but every one has been trying to make your home-coming a success ; and you *do* like it, don't you ?'

'Perfect ! Perfect ! There's no place like England—when you've done your work.'

'That's the proper way to look at it, my son.'

And so up and down the flagged walk till their shadows grew long in the moonlight, and the mother went indoors and played such songs as a small boy once clamoured for, and the squat silver candlesticks were brought in, and Georgie climbed to the two rooms in



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the west wing that had been his nursery and his play-room in the beginning. Then who should come to tuck him up for the night but the mother? And she sat down on the bed, and they talked for a long hour, as mother and son should, if there is to be any future for our Empire. With a simple woman's deep guile she asked questions and suggested answers that should have waked some sign in the face on the pillow, but there was neither quiver of eyelid nor quickening of breath, neither evasion nor delay in reply. So she blessed him and kissed him on the mouth, which is not always a mother's property, and said something to her husband later, at which he laughed profane and incredulous laughs.

All the establishment waited on Georgie next morning, from the tallest six-year-old, 'with a mouth like a kid





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glove, Master Georgie,' to the under-keeper strolling carelessly along the horizon, Georgie's pet rod in his hand, and 'There's a four-pounder risin' below the lasher. You don't 'ave 'em in Injia, Mast—Major Georgie.' It was all beautiful beyond telling, even though the mother insisted on taking him out in the landau (the leather had the hot Sunday smell of his youth), and showing him off to her friends at all the houses for six miles round ; and the Pater bore him up to town and a lunch at the club, where he introduced him, quite carelessly, to not less than thirty ancient warriors whose sons were not the youngest majors in the army, and had not the D.S.O. After that it was Georgie's turn ; and remembering his friends, he filled up the house with that kind of officer who lived in cheap lodgings at Southsea or Montpelier



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Square, Brompton—good men all, but not well off. The mother perceived that they needed girls to play with ; and as there was no scarcity of girls, the house hummed like a dovecote in spring. They tore up the place for amateur theatricals ; they disappeared in the gardens when they ought to have been rehearsing ; they swept off every available horse and vehicle, especially the governess-cart and the fat pony ; they fell into the trout-pond ; they picnicked and they tennised ; and they sat on gates in the twilight, two by two, and Georgie found that he was not in the least necessary to their entertainment.

‘ My word ! ’ said he, when he saw the last of their dear backs. ‘ They told me they’ve enjoyed ’emselfes, but they haven’t done half the things they said they would.’

‘ I know they’ve enjoyed themselves



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—immensely,’ said the mother. ‘You’re a public benefactor, dear.’

‘Now we can be quiet again, can’t we?’

‘Oh, quite. I’ve a very dear friend of mine that I want you to know. She couldn’t come with the house so full, because she’s an invalid, and she was away when you first came. She’s a Mrs. Lacy.’

‘Lacy! I don’t remember the name about here.’

‘No; they came after you went to India—from Oxford. Her husband died there, and she lost some money, I believe. They bought The Firs on the Bassett Road. She’s a very sweet woman, and we’re very fond of them both.’

‘She’s a widow, didn’t you say?’

‘She has a daughter. Surely I said so, dear?’

‘Does she fall into trout-ponds, and



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gas and giggle, and “ Oh, Major Cottah ! ” and all that sort of thing ? ’

‘ No, indeed. She’s a very quiet girl, and very musical. She always came over here with her music-books—composing, you know ; and she generally works all day, so you won’t——’

‘ Talking about Miriam ? ’ said the Pater, coming up. The mother edged toward him within elbow reach. There was no finesse about Georgie’s father. ‘ Oh, Miriam’s a dear girl. Plays beautifully. Rides beautifully, too. She’s a regular pet of the household. Used to call me——’ The elbow went home, and ignorant, but obedient always, the Pater shut himself off.

‘ What used she to call you, sir ? ’

‘ All sorts of pet names. I’m very fond of Miriam.’

‘ Sounds Jewish—Miriam.’

‘ Jew ! You’ll be calling yourself a





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Jew next. She's one of the Herefordshire Lacys. When her aunt dies——' Again the elbow.

'Oh, you won't see anything of her, Georgie. She's busy with her music or her mother all day. Besides, you're going up to town to-morrow, aren't you? I thought you said something about an Institute meeting?' The mother spoke.

'Go up to town *now*! What nonsense!' Once more the Pater was shut off.

'I had some idea of it, but I'm not quite sure,' said the son of the house. Why did the mother try to get him away because a musical girl and her invalid parent were expected? He did not approve of unknown females calling his father pet names. He would observe these pushing persons who had been only seven years in the county.



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All of which the delighted mother read in his countenance, herself keeping an air of sweet disinterestedness.

‘They’ll be here this evening for dinner. I’m sending the carriage over for them, and they won’t stay more than a week.’

‘Perhaps I shall go up to town. I don’t quite know yet.’ George moved away irresolutely. There was a lecture at the United Services Institute on the supply of ammunition in the field, and the one man whose theories most irritated Major Cottar would deliver it. A heated discussion was sure to follow, and perhaps he might find himself moved to speak. He took his rod that afternoon and went down to thrash it out among the trout.

‘Good sport, dear!’ said the mother, from the terrace.

‘Fraid it won’t be, mummy. All



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those men from town, and the girls particularly, have put every trout off his feed for weeks. There isn't one of 'em that cares for fishin'—really. Fancy stampin' and shoutin' on the bank, and tellin' every fish for half a mile exactly what you're goin' to do, and then chuckin' a brute of a fly at him ! By Jove, it would scare *me* if I were a trout !'

But things were not as bad as he had expected. The black gnat was on the water, and the water was strictly preserved. A three-quarter-pounder at the second cast set him for the campaign, and he worked down-stream, crouching behind the reed and meadow-sweet ; creeping between a hornbeam hedge and a foot-wide strip of bank, where he could see the trout, but where they could not distinguish him from the background ; lying on his



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stomach to switch the blue-upright sidewise through the checkered shadows of a gravelly ripple under overarching trees. But he had known every inch of the water since he was four feet high. The aged and astute between sunk roots, with the large and fat that lay in the frothy scum below some strong rush of water, sucking lazily as carp, came to trouble in their turn, at the hand that imitated so delicately the flicker and wimple of an egg-dropping fly. Consequently, Georgie found himself five miles from home when he ought to have been dressing for dinner. The housekeeper had taken good care that her boy should not go empty, and before he changed to the white moth he sat down to excellent claret with sandwiches of potted egg and things that adoring women make and men never notice.





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Then back, to surprise the otter grubbing for fresh-water mussels, the rabbits on the edge of the beechwoods foraging in the clover, and the policeman-like white owl stooping to the little field-mice, till the moon was strong, and he took his rod apart, and went home through well-remembered gaps in the hedges. He fetched a compass round the house, for, though he might have broken every law of the establishment every hour, the law of his boyhood was unbreakable: after fishing you went in by the south garden back-door, cleaned up in the outer scullery, and did not present yourself to your elders and your betters till you had washed and changed.

‘Half-past ten, by Jove! Well, we’ll make the sport an excuse. They wouldn’t want to see me the first evening, at any rate. Gone to bed,



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probably.' He skirted by the open French windows of the drawing-room. 'No, they haven't. They look very comfy in there.'

He could see his father in his own particular chair, the mother in hers, and the back of a girl at the piano by the big potpourri-jar. The garden showed half divine in the moonlight, and he turned down through the roses to finish his pipe.

A prelude ended, and there floated out a voice of the kind that in his childhood he used to call 'creamy'—a full, true contralto; and this is the song that he heard, every syllable of it :

Over the edge of the purple Down,  
Where the single lamplight gleams,  
Know ye the road to Merciful Town  
That is hard by the Sea of Dreams—  
Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,  
And the sick may forget to weep?



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

But we—pity us ! Oh, pity us !—  
We wakeful ; ah, pity us !—  
We must go back with Policeman Day—  
Back from the City of Sleep !

Weary they turn from the scroll and crown,  
Fetter and prayer and plough—  
They that go up to the Merciful Town,  
For her gates are closing now,  
It is their right in the Baths of Night  
Body and soul to steep :  
But we—pity us ! ah, pity us !—  
We wakeful ; oh, pity us !—  
We must go back with Policeman Day—  
Back from the City of Sleep !

Over the edge of the purple Down,  
Ere the tender dreams begin,  
Look—we may look—at the Merciful Town,  
But we may not enter in !  
Outcasts all, from her guarded wall  
Back to our watch we creep :  
We—pity us ! ah, pity us !—  
We wakeful ; oh, pity us !—  
We that go back with Policeman Day—  
Back from the City of Sleep !

At the last echo he was aware that  
his mouth was dry and unknown pulses  
were beating in the roof of it. The



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housekeeper, who would have it that he must have fallen in and caught a chill, was waiting to advise him on the stairs, and, since he neither saw nor answered her, carried a wild tale abroad that brought his mother knocking at the door.

‘Anything happened, dear? Harper said she thought you weren’t——’

‘No; it’s nothing. I’m all right, mummy. *Please* don’t bother.’

He did not recognise his own voice, but that was a small matter beside what he was considering. Obviously, most obviously, the whole coincidence was crazy lunacy. He proved it to the satisfaction of Major George Cottar, who was going up to town to-morrow to hear a lecture on the supply of ammunition in the field; and having so proved it, the soul and brain and heart and body of Georgie cried joy-





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ously : ‘That’s the Lily Lock girl—the Lost Continent girl—the Thirty-Mile-Ride girl—the Brushwood girl ! *I know her !*’

He waked, stiff and cramped in his chair, to reconsider the situation by sunlight, when it did not appear normal. But a man must eat, and he went to breakfast, his heart between his teeth, holding himself severely in hand.

‘Late, as usual,’ said the mother. ‘My boy, Miriam.’

A tall girl in black raised her eyes to his, and Georgie’s life training deserted him—just as soon as he realised that she did not know. He stared coolly and critically. There was the abundant black hair, growing in a widow’s peak, turned back from the forehead, with that peculiar ripple over the right ear ; there were the grey eyes set a little close together ; the short



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upper lip, resolute chin, and the known poise of the head. There was also the small, well-cut mouth that had kissed him.

‘Georgie—*dear*!’ said the mother, amazedly, for Miriam was flushing under the stare.

‘I—I beg your pardon!’ he gulped. ‘I don’t know whether the mother has told you, but I’m rather an idiot at times, specially before I’ve had my breakfast. It’s—it’s a family failing.’ He turned to explore among the hot-water dishes on the sideboard, rejoicing that she did not know—she did not know.

His conversation for the rest of the meal was mildly insane, though the mother thought she had never seen her boy look half so handsome. How could any girl, least of all one of Miriam’s discernment, forbear to fall



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down and worship? But deeply Miriam was displeased. She had never been stared at in that fashion before, and promptly retired into her shell when Georgie announced that he had changed his mind about going to town, and would stay to play with Miss Lacy if she had nothing better to do.

‘Oh, but don’t let me throw you out. I’m at work. I’ve things to do all the morning.’

‘What possessed Georgie to behave so oddly?’ the mother sighed to herself. ‘Miriam’s a bundle of feelings—like her mother.’

‘You compose, don’t you? Must be a fine thing to be able to do that. [‘Pig—oh, pig!’ thought Miriam.] I think I heard you singin’ when I came in last night after fishin’. All about a Sea of Dreams, wasn’t it? [Miriam shuddered to the core of the



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soul that afflicted her.] Awfully pretty song. How d'you think of such things ?'

'You only composed the music, dear, didn't you ?'

'The words too, mummy. I'm sure of it,' said Georgie, with a sparkling eye. No ; she did not know.

'Yeth ; I wrote the words too.' Miriam spoke slowly, for she knew she lisped when she was nervous.

'Now how *could* you tell, Georgie ?' said the mother, as delighted as though the youngest major in the Army were ten years old, showing off before company.

'I was sure of it, somehow. Oh, there are heaps of things about me, mummy, that you don't understand. Looks as if it were goin' to be a hot day—for England. Would you care for a ride this afternoon, Miss Lacy ?





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We can start out after tea, if you'd like it.'

Miriam could not in decency refuse, but any woman might see she was not filled with delight.

'That will be very nice, if you take the Bassett Road. It will save me sending Martin down to the village,' said the mother, filling in gaps.

Like all good managers, the mother had her one weakness—a mania for little strategies that should economise horses and vehicles. Her men-folk complained that she turned them into common carriers, and there was a legend in the family that she had once said to the Pater on the morning of a meet : 'If you *should* kill near Bassett, dear, and if it isn't too late, would you mind just popping over and matching me this ?'

'I knew that was coming. You'd



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

never miss a chance, mother. If it's fish or a trunk, I won't.' Georgie laughed.

'It's only a duck. They can do it up very neatly at Mallett's,' said the mother simply. 'You won't mind, will you? We'll have a scratch dinner at nine, because it's so hot.'

The long summer day dragged itself out for centuries ; but at last there was tea on the lawn, and Miriam appeared.

She was in the saddle, before he could offer to help, with the clean spring of the child who mounted the pony for the Thirty-Mile-Ride. The day held mercilessly, though Georgie got down thrice to look for imaginary stones in Rufus's foot. One cannot say even simple things in broad light, and this that Georgie meditated was not simple. So he spoke seldom, and Miriam was divided between relief and



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

scorn. It annoyed her that the great hulking thing should know she had written the words of the song overnight ; for though a maiden may sing her most secret fancies aloud, she does not care to have them trampled over by the male Philistine. They rode into the little red-brick street of Bassett, and Georgie made untold fuss over the disposition of that duck. It must go in just such a package, and be fastened to the saddle in just such a manner, though eight o'clock had passed and they were miles from dinner.

‘ We must be quick ! ’ said Miriam, bored and angry.

‘ There’s no great hurry ; but we can cut over Dowhead Down, and let ’em out on the grass. That will save us half an hour.’

The horses capered on the short, sweet-smelling turf, and the delaying



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

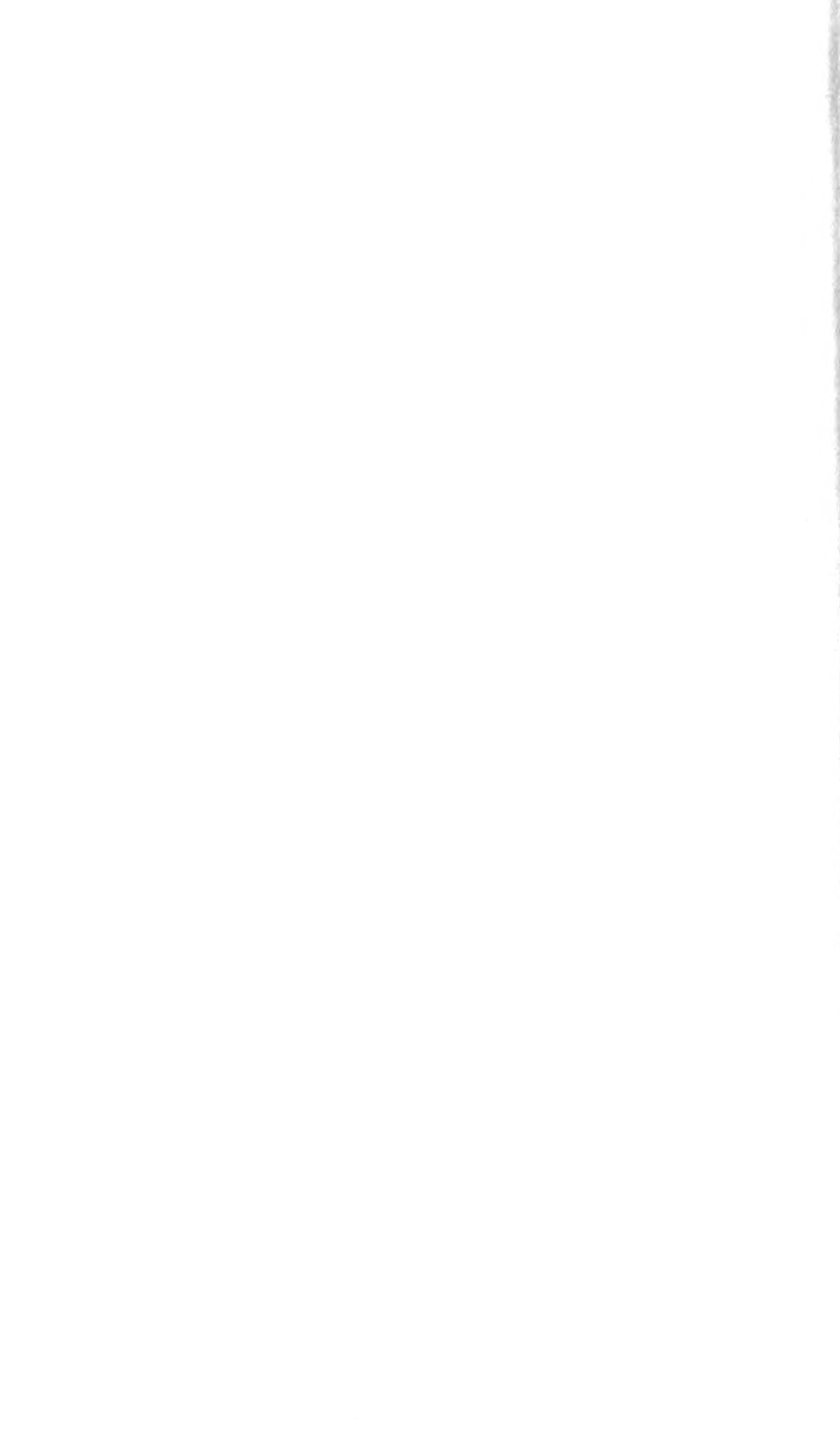
shadows gathered in the valley as they cantered over the great dun down that overhangs Bassett and the Western coaching-road. Insensibly the pace quickened without thought of mole-hills; Rufus, gentleman that he was, waiting on Miriam's Dandy till they should have cleared the rise. Then down the two-mile slope they raced together, the wind whistling in their ears, to the steady throb of eight hoofs and the light click-click of the shifting bits.

‘Oh, that was glorious!’ Miriam cried, reining in. ‘Dandy and I are old friends, but I don't think we've ever gone better together.’

‘No; but you've gone quicker, once or twice.’

‘Really? When?’

Georgie moistened his lips. ‘Don't you remember the Thirty-Mile-Ride—





## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

with me—when “They” were after us—on the beach road, with the sea to the left—going toward the Lamp-post on the Downs?’

The girl gasped. ‘What—what do you mean?’ she said hysterically.

‘The Thirty-Mile-Ride, and—and all the rest of it.’

‘You mean——? I didn’t sing anything about the Thirty-Mile-Ride. I know I didn’t. I have never told a living soul.’

‘You told about Policeman Day, and the lamp at the top of the Downs, and the City of Sleep. It all joins on, you know—it’s the same country—and it was easy enough to see where you had been.’

‘Good God!—It joins on—of course it does; but—I have been—you have been—— Oh, let’s walk, please, or I shall fall off!’



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

Georgie ranged alongside, and laid a hand that shook below her bridle-hand, pulling Dandy into a walk. Miriam was sobbing as he had seen a man sob under the touch of the bullet.

‘It’s all right—it’s all right,’ he whispered feebly. ‘Only—only it’s true, you know.’

‘True ! Am I mad ?’

‘Not unless I’m mad as well. *Do* try to think a minute quietly. How could any one conceivably know anything about the Thirty-Mile-Ride having anything to do with you, unless he had been there ?’

‘But where ? But *where* ? Tell me !’

‘There—wherever it may be—in our country, I suppose. Do you remember the first time you rode it—the Thirty-Mile-Ride, I mean ? You must.’

‘It was all dreams—all dreams !’



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

‘Yes, but tell, please; because I know.’

‘Let me think. I—we were on no account to make any noise—on no account to make any noise.’ She was staring between Dandy’s ears with eyes that did not see, and a suffocating heart.

‘Because “It” was dying in the big house?’ Georgie went on, reining in again.

‘There was a garden with green-and-gilt railings—all hot. Do *you* remember?’

‘I ought to. I was sitting on the other side of the bed before “It” coughed and “They” came in.’

‘You!’—the deep voice was unnaturally full and strong, and the girl’s wide, opened eyes burned in the dusk as she stared him through and through. ‘Then you’re the Boy—my Brushwood Boy, and I’ve known you all my life!’

She fell forward on Dandy’s neck.



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

Georgie forced himself out of the weakness that was overmastering his limbs, and slid an arm round her waist. The head dropped on his shoulder, and he found himself with parched lips saying things that up till then he believed existed only in printed works of fiction. Mercifully the horses were quiet. She made no attempt to draw herself away when she recovered, but lay still, whispering, 'Of course you're the Boy, and I didn't know—I didn't know.'

'I knew last night ; and when I saw you at breakfast——'

'Oh, *that* was why ! I wondered at the time. You would, of course.'

'I couldn't speak before this. Keep your head where it is, dear. It's all right now—all right now, isn't it ?'

'But how was it *I* didn't know—after all these years and years ? I remember—oh, what lots of things I remember !'





## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

‘Tell me some. I’ll look after the horses.’

‘I remember waiting for you when the steamer came in. Do you?’

‘At the Lily Lock, beyond Hong-Kong and Java?’

‘Do *you* call it that, too?’

‘You told me it was when I was lost in the continent. That was you that showed me the way through the mountains?’

‘When the islands slid? It must have been, because you’re the only one I remember. All the others were “Them.”’

‘Awful brutes they were, too.’

‘Yes, I remember showing you the Thirty-Mile-Ride the first time. You ride just as you used to—then. You *are* you!’

‘That’s odd. I thought that of you this afternoon. Isn’t wonderful?’







'THIS!' SAID GEORGIE.

## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

‘What does it all mean? Why should you and I of the millions of people in the world have this—this thing between us? What does it mean? I’m frightened.’

‘This!’ said Georgie. The horses quickened their pace. They thought they had heard an order. ‘Perhaps when we die we may find out more, but it means this now.’

There was no answer. What could she say? As the world went, they had known each other rather less than eight and a half hours, but the matter was one that did not concern the world. There was a very long silence, while the breath in their nostrils drew cold and sharp as it might have been fumes of ether.

‘That’s the second,’ Georgie whispered. ‘You remember, don’t you?’



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

‘It’s not!’—furiously. ‘It’s not!’

‘On the downs the other night—months ago. You were just as you are now, and we went over the country for miles and miles.’

‘It was all empty, too. They had gone away. Nobody frightened us. I wonder why, Boy?’

‘Oh, if you remember *that*, you must remember the rest. Confess!’

‘I remember lots of things, but I *know* I didn’t. I never have—till just now.’

‘You *did*, dear.’

‘I know I didn’t, because—oh, it’s no use keeping anything back!—because I truthfully meant to.’

‘And truthfully did.’

‘No; meant to; but some one else came by.’

‘There wasn’t any one else. There never has been.’









'IT WAS ANOTHER WOMAN.'

## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

‘There was—there always is. It was another woman—out there on the sea. I saw her. It was the 26th of May. I’ve got it written down somewhere.’

‘Oh, *you*’ve kept a record of your dreams, too? That’s odd about the other woman, because I happened to be on the sea just then.’

‘I was right. How do I know what you’ve done—when you were awake. And I thought it was only *you*!’

‘You never were more wrong in your life. What a little temper you’ve got! Listen to me a minute, dear.’ And Georgie, though he knew it not, committed black perjury. ‘It—it isn’t the kind of thing one says to any one, because they’d laugh; but on my word and honour, darling, I’ve never been kissed by a living soul outside my own



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

people in all my life. Don't laugh, dear. I wouldn't tell any one but you, but it's the solemn truth.'

'I knew ! You are you. Oh, I *knew* you'd come some day ; but I didn't know you were you in the least till you spoke.'

'Then give me another.'

'And you never cared or looked anywhere ? Why, all the round world must have loved you from the very minute they saw you, Boy.'

'They kept it to themselves if they did. No ; I never cared.'

And we shall be late for dinner—horribly late. Oh, how can I look at you in the light before your mother—and mine !'

'We'll play you're Miss Lacy till the proper time comes. What's the shortest limit for people to get engaged ? S'pose we have got to go through



## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

all the fuss of an engagement, haven't we ?'

'Oh, I don't want to talk about that. It's so commonplace. I've thought of something that you don't know. I'm sure of it. What's my name?'

'Miri—no, it isn't, by Jove ! Wait half a second, and it'll come back to me. You aren't—you can't ? Why, *those* old tales—before I went to school ! I've never thought of 'em from that day to this. Are you the original, only Annieanlouise ?'

'It was what you always called me ever since the beginning. Oh ! We've turned into the avenue, and we must be an hour late.'

'What does it matter ? The chain goes as far back as those days ? It must, of course—of course it must. I've got to ride round with this pestilent old bird—confound him !'





## THE BRUSHWOOD BOY

““Ha ! ha !” said the duck, laughing”—do you remember *that* ?’

‘Yes, I do—flower-pots on my feet, and all. We’ve been together all this while ; and I’ve got to say good-bye to you till dinner. ‘*Sure* I’ll see you at dinner-time ? ‘*Sure* you won’t sneak up to your room, darling, and leave me all the evening ? Good-bye, dear—good-bye.’

‘Good-bye, Boy, good-bye. Mind the arch ! Don’t let Rufus bolt into his stable. Good-bye. Yes, I’ll come down to dinner ; but—what shall I do when I see you in the light ?’

THE END

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